

REMARKS

The undersigned attorney gratefully acknowledges the telephone interview granted by Examiner Lincoln Donovan on May 17, 2004.

At that interview, the patentable merits of claim 4 were discussed. While the Examiner made no commitment, he indicated that he would favorably reconsider the patentable merits of claim 4 particularly if claim 1 were amended to include the limitations of that claim and all intervening claims.

Accordingly, claim 1 has been revised to incorporate both the limitations of claim 4 and intervening claim 2. Claim 1 now recites a switch structure of a steering wheel at which a pair of opening portions are symmetrically formed between an inner periphery of a steering wheel rim and an outer periphery of a pad cover, wherein an arrangement and a shape of the plurality of switches constituting each switch assembly is determined so as to be symmetrical with respect to a radially-oriented base line bisecting each of the opening portions, and wherein each of the switch assemblies comprises:

“an elongated body portion including an elongated mounting member offset from and extending away from said body portion in a radial direction towards said pad cover in a position substantially parallel with said elongated body portion, and having end portions adapted to be attached to spokes of said steering wheel...”

The new limitations incorporated into claim 1 are easily seen in Figures 4 and 5. In particular, the elongated mounting member that is “offset from and extending away from said body portion in a radial direction towards said pad cover..” may be seen in Figure 5, and refers to the mounting member 72. The recited end portions adapted to be attached to the spokes of the steering wheel are best seen in Figure 4, at reference numerals 74.

None of the references of record either discloses or suggests the aforementioned limitations of amended claim 1. The Leng ‘283 patent discloses only a mounting tab 18 or 18’ (See Figures 4 and 5) that extends down the side of the switching assembly in a direction parallel to the axis of rotation of the steering wheel. It does not extend away

from the body portion of this respective switch “in a radial direction towards said pad cover.” Moreover, it does not have “end portions adapted to be attached to spokes of said steering wheel..”

The Rudolph ‘884 patent is similarly irrelevant. All this reference discloses are switches 9 having mounting tabs 14 that extend longitudinally from the housing 11 of each switch in a roughly circumferential direction. The mounting tabs 14 are not “offset from and extending away from said body portion in a radial direction towards said pad cover, ..” For all these reasons, amended claim 1 is clearly patentable over both the Leng ‘283 and Rudolph ‘884 patents.

Nor is amended claim 1 rendered “obvious” in view of any tenable combination of the Leng ‘283 and Rudolph ‘884 patents. Neither of these references discloses or suggests the specifically recited elongated mounting member that is “offset from and extending away from said body portion in a radial direction toward said pad cover in a position substantially parallel with said elongated body portion,..” As neither of the references includes the aforementioned limitation, and as there is absolutely no teaching, incentive or motivation to modify either of these references (or the combination thereof) to disclose the aforementioned limitation, amended claim 1 is clearly patentable over any tenable combination of the Leng ‘283 and Rudolph ‘884 patents.

Claim 2 has been cancelled, since the limitation therein has been incorporated into amended claim 1.

Claim 3 has been withdrawn, and further discussion of this claim is deemed necessary.

As indicated before, the limitation of claim 4 has also been incorporated into amended claim 1. Accordingly, this claim has been cancelled.

Both independent claims 5 and 6 had been revised to include the limitation recited in the last paragraph of amended claim 1. Accordingly, both of these claims are patentable at least by reason of such amendment.

Claim 7 recites that the body portion of each of the switch assemblies “has a bottom end that is laterally displaced away from said topside toward said pad cover..”

This particular feature of the invention is best seen in Figure 5. Note how the bottom end of the switch 12 is laterally displaced away from the topside of the body portion of the switch toward the pad cover as a result of the arcuate shape of the body portion. As none of the references either discloses or suggest this particular feature of the invention, claim 7 is patentable only by reason of its dependency upon claim 1, but by reason of the limitation recited therein. In the interview held on May 17, the Examiner admitted his error in not considering the patentable merits of this claim by virtue of his mistaken reasoning that claim 7 recited a non-elected embodiment. As claim 7 clearly recites features of the elected embodiment illustrated in Figures 1-5, favorable reconsideration of the patentable merits of this claim is appropriate.

Claim 8 has been withdrawn as it reads upon a non-elected embodiment in the invention.

Now that all the pending claims are believed to allowable, the prompt issuance of a Notice of Allowance and Issue Fee Due is hereby earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,



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